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# INFORMATION REPORT

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COUNTRY

Panama

SUBJECT

Personalities and Factors Affecting the Guizado Trial and the Assassination of Late President Remón

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To 4 Apr 55

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THIS IS UNEVALUATED INFORMATION

SOURCE

1. As of 4 Apr 55, three men hold the political power in Panama. They are:

a. Alejandro "Toto" Remón, brother of the slain president; He is now Minister of Government and Justice in the Cabinet; has a reputation as a ruthless racketeer; is money-hungry; and has not the administrative ability and political experience of his slain brother.

b. Col. Bolívar Vallarino, First Commander of the Guardia Nacional, controls the only armed force in the country of Panama. He was a close friend of José Remón and is extremely close to "Toto."

c. Harmodio Arias, ex-president and owner and publisher of the Panama American, in English and Spanish, as well as of the notoriously anti-Gringo daily La Hora, which has the largest circulation in Panama. He owns a couple of radio stations and probably is the richest man in Panama. Now in his 70's, Harmodio Arias is still mad for political power. From all reports he would like to be president again. He also has four sons, one of whom he would like to have president of Panama. Reportedly he paid an enormous sum to have his son Roberto appointed Ambassador to Great Britain. Roberto, incidentally, has been mentioned often in connection with narcotics smuggling under diplomatic passport while assigned to the UN. Arias's other sons are Harmodio, Jr., Gilberto and Antonio. The latter was reportedly found at Tocumen Airport on one occasion with a whole plane load of dope. At the time Antonio Arias was Aeronautical Inspector for the Panama government and was flying his own plane so when the discovery was made, he got back into the plane, took off, and no action was taken.

2. "Toto" Remón and Colonel Vallarino are 2/3 of the three-man junta who reportedly would like to take over in Panama. Whether Harmodio Arias would join them or would have someone sit in the junta while he remained in the background is not clear as of this date [4 Apr 55].

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DATE: JAN 2006

3. For several weeks it seemed certain that the junta would throw out President Ricardo M. Arias, who is able and honest and will not go along with the junta's rob-the-treasury ideas. The reasons why they have not done so, I hear, are based on the US's reportedly having informally advised Panamanian political leaders that three presidents in 15 days in January 1955 was Panama's full quota for this year. (Apparently another change of government in Panama would be regarded as proof of Panama's instability and the US would be loath to recognize any *de facto* government here in Panama--especially if the removal of able, honest Ricardo Arias were involved.
4. Panamanian participants realize that non-recognition by the US means that the all-important US-Panama Treaty (called the Remon-Eisenhower Treaty here in Panama, signed in Panama City, 25 Jan 55 and ratified by the Panama National Assembly 10 Mar 55) will not be ratified by the US Senate, as it must be before it becomes effective. There are so many millions of dollars which will come into Panama as a result of the Treaty that even the racketeers hesitate to do anything to delay its ratification. Actually, the Treaty has enormous potentials for Panama, economically and politically, for it promises increased income immediately, offers the basis for obtaining multi-million dollar loans from US private banks, will increase business opportunities for Panama merchants, and reportedly will increase employment opportunities in the Canal Zone for Panama nationals.
5. The political control for disbursement of this income is being sought by the junta but their action must be delayed until after the Treaty is ratified by the US or there will be no ratification. Therefore, right now [early April 1955] although the proposed junta is anxious to get rid of Ricardo Arias, they cannot afford to do without him, for he's like the goose with the golden egg. In fact, it is said that the only way Arias is keeping the cabinet from robbing the country wholesale is by threatening to resign. There are many unsatiable pigs who want to have more than their fill from the government fiscal trough, and Arias is certainly having trouble with them.
6. Chichi Remon, it will be remembered, was a veritable dictator because he had the police behind him--with which he could back up his orders. Toto Remon, who is Minister of Government and Justice, although the titular head of the law and order forces here, with the commander of the Guardia Nacional, are on the opposite side of the fence from Ricardo Arias. Arias, in other words, does not have the tools to govern with. So much for the facts.
7. As for the rumors, which cannot be evaluated at the moment [4 Apr 55] there are many:
  - a. It is widely stated that Remon was killed for blocking the nefarious drug traffic from Panama to Europe and the US. He is said to have been cognizant of it and did not stop his cohorts from conducting it until the US got busy. It is rumored that the US said that if Remon did not stop the drug traffic, his precious treaty would not be considered by the US.
  - b. To Chichi Remon that treaty was the high spot of his life, his brain child, his pet project; so he capitulated. He issued orders to stop the drug traffic regardless of who got hurt--so many officials were making large sums of money that they are said to have instigated the assassination of Remon.

8. While this sounds unalarming, there have been assurances of one fact--there is narcotic traffic from Panama to the US, and it is believed that an ex-president is head of the ring and that he has used his sons and political friends to aid in the distribution not only to the US but to Europe. [The foregoing, taken with earlier remarks, indicates that Harmodio Arias is meant.] It is not believed that this is a scheduled weekly or monthly operation with regular couriers, but rather a business of opportunity with the stakes so high that the cupidty of these local politicians is aroused. There is a belief that diplomatic pouches and official courtesies of the port are involved. And the smuggling, of course, includes other items than narcotics.
  9. Ex-President Remón never permitted anyone, including himself, to make "treasury raids" on the government. He had made his pile while Chief of Police so that he could afford to appear honest as President. He severely censured his cabinet, officials and others for trying to make "side money" from the government through dishonest contracts, etc. While he cursed them publicly for their criminal activities and so brought hate upon himself, no one dared to stand up against ex-President Remón until 2 Jan 55. However, it has become increasingly clear that this rule did not apply to private industry--the "hands in the till" rule--for various officials were getting cuts from big business in Panama in new ventures opening up, in getting work done free, etc.
  10. With Chichi Remón dead, the officials hoped to get some of the government money which was formerly denied them by Remón but Ricardo Arias forbids it. These people cannot bear to think of the millions under the Treaty which would be available for stealing if it were not for an honest president. Their only answer is: Don't have an honest president.
  11. In this connection, the Junta will take care of that if it can get in power. And with Colonel Vallarino one of its leaders, who can stop it outside of the US? And its club will be removed if and when the US Senate ratifies the Treaty.
- [REDACTED]
12. As for the Guizado trial, it was certainly unprecedented, with the National Assembly, which proclaimed itself a "court of justice," finding ex-President José Ramón Guizado guilty of being an accessory to the assassination of President José Antonio Remón on 2 Jan 55. Guizado, of course, was sentenced to six years, eight months' imprisonment which will be served at a location to be announced by the government. That the trial was a "farce", a "political frame", a "crooked piece of work", a "disgraceful travesty" can be heard throughout the Isthmus. One of the local newspaper editors in Panama told me "it stinks; the whole trial was crooked." But of course his newspaper did not say so and for the first time the reported freedom of the press in Panama seems to have disappeared, for usually there is at least one paper which will print the second side of a question. In this unusual situation the papers, the radio and all of the propaganda media were anti-Guizado. There was little or no objective reporting and it was a "fixed jury" from the start.
  13. Actually there was no jury, for it was the National Assembly, a political organization like the US Congress, which constituted itself a court to hear a criminal case; it was a political body acting as judge and jury in a criminal matter. Normal juridical principles were thrown out the window. There were no witnesses in court; there was no cross-examination because there was no one there but Guizado to be examined. The trial was conducted by having the depositions taken from scores of people read to the Assembly.

There were 53 Assemblymen, of whom 45 voted to convict and eight to acquit. The depositions were taken by the Guardia Nacional or by an Investigating Committee which was out to "get" Guizado. Some of the statements read as "evidence" to the Assembly had already been repudiated by those who made them. Some of the individuals making these statements had been proved liars. But that was the evidence. Hearsay-evidence was the principal item...but in this case it was not even identified as hearsay evidence--it was offered as fact.

14. At the trial the principal purported evidence against Guizado was the confession of Ruben Miró, the alleged murderer of Remón. Miró has changed his story a dozen times already but he does not admit, according to the police or the Guardia Nacional, that he did kill Remón. The main inconsistency of the trial (which Panama's outstanding lawyers have labeled "a disgrace to Panama in the eyes of the world") is this: In addition to Miró, who says he killed Remón, the police are holding 12 other individuals (none of them important figures), each of whom is said to have known of the plan to kill Remón. Yet none of these individuals has been tried nor is slated for trial before July 1955.
15. Why was Guizado singled out for attention? It does seem preposterous to try an accomplice before trying the murderer and to convict the alleged accomplice on the testimony of the accused murderer.
16. Also appalling to those attending the trial were the obvious attempts of the government forces to influence the trial--not those controlled by President Arias, but those controlled by Minister of Governor and Justice Toto Remón and Commander Vallarino. Uniformed Guardia Nacional were observed handing out inflammatory anti-Guizado leaflets and handbills. Aircraft flew low over the Assembly building and dropped lurid handbills which the children and police picked up and distributed within the Assembly meeting while the trial was proceeding.
17. Mrs. Cecelia Pinel de Remón did not attend the trial itself, but one evening she sat outside the Assembly building in the park with a group of poor people. Many wondered if it was by chance that she was "discovered" by the press photographer so that the papers had her picture on the front page, grieving for her husband in public, as his mental assassin was being tried. Actually this was scheduled with the press. The whole performance made a bad impression on any unprejudiced individual who attended the trial or even studied it. All the Spanish radio stations carried the entire proceedings and the whole Panama nation listened to it via radio--there being no TV in Panama.
18. Even the people who were overwhelmingly opposed to Guizado at the start of the trial were so deluged with propaganda that they awakened to it and asked "why"; "who is forcing this propaganda on us?" and "Why?"
19. The most careful observers do not think that Guizado is an innocent man but they think he may be one of several cabinet ministers and prominent officials who planned to remove Remón because the latter was preventing them from racketeering. There is no reason to believe that Guizado contemplated violence, far less assassination, in removing Remón; for there have been many bloodless coups in Panama, where actually no president in 19 years has served a full four-year term. These observers believe that Guizado was implicated but that he is being made the goat for all the rest; and no one can say who, if any, contemplated murder to get rid of Remón. Apparently the Assembly had to convict Guizado to be sure he did not regain the presidency. After all, he was never formally removed until after his trial; previously he had been only suspended. If found not guilty he would have resumed the executive power. The Assembly had to justify its precipitate action of 16 Jan 55 when it impeached Guizado, suspended him and arrested him and held him incommunicado from family or lawyers, all on the flimsiest of circumstantial evidence. While they probably did right, they certainly had no legal basis for doing so at that time.